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ABSTRACT

This book explores how community functions in "Bremer," a small rural town in eastern Washington. Human interactions in a variety of contexts are analyzed within a framework that posits three distinct eras of social and economic organization: community-control, mass-society, and information eras. Contexts examined are farming (the economic mainstay of Bremer), other businesses, community organizations, gender roles, medical care, the school, religion, social life, and the annual Bremer Fair and Stock Show. At the U.S. societal level, the community-control era, in which people's lives are focused on and constrained to their community of residence, is mostly past. But in Bremer, community-control processes persist to a remarkable extent. In every sphere of life, there exist ascribed behaviors, informal rules, particularistic decisions, concern with the whole person, concern with tradition, and other community-guided behaviors. Descriptions of two school board meetings and what happened between the meetings illustrate how these behaviors foster community involvement in decision making and eventual acceptance of an unpopular cooperative agreement with another school district. On a daily basis, Bremerites are engaged in a struggle between maintaining community processes and responding to the intrusions of mass society. This struggle is most evident in the school, which is at the heart of Bremer's identity but which must satisfy state mandates and prepare children for possible employment in the outside world. For those who would build intentional community in other places, the final chapter offers insights into the reasons for the persistence of community in Bremer as well as the price that individuals must pay for community. An appendix describes research methodology. This book contains 53 references and an index. (SV)